

Professional Ethics in Higher Education: A Quantitative Study of Lecturers at ATI Gampaha

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ABSTRACT

Professional ethics play a vital role in shaping the integrity, fairness, and credibility of higher education institutions. This study investigates the level of ethical awareness, confidence in ethical practice, and the challenges faced by academic staff at the Advanced Technological Institute (ATI), Gampaha. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to lecturers across different designations and experience levels. Descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation, factor analysis, and chi-square tests were employed to analyse respondents' perceptions and experiences. The findings indicate that while all lecturers are familiar with professional ethics, only 44.44% reported high confidence in applying ethical principles, revealing a gap between awareness and practical implementation. Nearly half of the respondents (44.44%) had encountered ethical challenges, although statistical tests showed no significant association between ethical challenges and either designation or years of experience. A notable majority (66.67%) had not received formal ethics training, despite 77.78% expressing strong interest in such programs. Overall, the study highlights the need for structured ethics training and stronger institutional support to promote ethical decision-making and enhance academic integrity. Strengthening these areas can contribute to a more transparent, fair, and professionally responsible educational environment at ATI Gampaha.

Keywords: professional ethics, lecturers, higher education, challenges, training

INTRODUCTION

Professional ethics encompass the moral principles and standards that direct individuals in executing their responsibilities with integrity and equity in their professional capacities. In education, professional ethics are crucial, as teachers significantly influence both the academic skills and moral character of their students. Educators are anticipated to embody principles such as integrity, equity, respect, and accountability in all facets of their duties, encompassing instruction, research, and professional engagements. This study examines the professional ethics of the academic staff at the Advanced Technological Institute (ATI) in Gampaha, Sri Lanka, with the objective of discerning the practice and perception of these ethical values within the institution.

Ethics in education are essential for fostering a conducive academic environment that encourages learning, equity, and individual development. Teachers serve not only as educators but also as role models who shape students' attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making processes. The ethical behavior of educators directly influences the formation of students' values, professionalism, and social responsibility. When educators exhibit fairness, integrity, and respect in their interactions with students, they cultivate individuals who will embody these values in their future professions. Consequently, analyzing the application of ethical principles by academic staff in their professional endeavors is crucial for enhancing both individual and institutional efficacy.

Several reasons highlight the importance of studying professional ethics in academic institutions. The ethical conduct of lecturers exemplifies a standard for students, shaping their moral compass and professional demeanor. When educators demonstrate honesty and fairness, students comprehend the significance of integrity and ethical decision-making in their own lives. Furthermore, an institution's reputation is closely linked to the ethical standards upheld by its personnel. A favorable reputation, founded on trust and credibility, draws students and enhances public confidence in the institution's educational standards.

Thirdly, ensuring educational quality is a vital component of professional ethics. Ethical teaching practices encourage transparency, objectivity, and equity in evaluations, cultivating a respectful and motivating educational atmosphere. These attributes directly enhance educational outcomes and promote ongoing institutional advancement. Ultimately, fostering respectful relationships among educators, students, and parents is a fundamental result of ethical behavior. Mutual respect and understanding create a supportive environment that enhances both learning and personal development.

In conclusion, professional ethics constitute the cornerstone of effective and respected teaching. By exploring how the academic staff at ATI Gampaha understand and implement these principles, this study seeks to highlight the role of ethics in maintaining academic integrity, improving institutional standards, and shaping the next generation of responsible professionals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethics in education is really important because it guides teachers to behave properly and create a better environment for students. Ethics are generally understood as moral principles that guide human behavior, while professional ethics refer specifically to standards that regulate conduct within a profession [1] In the teaching profession, ethical behavior is essential because teachers not only impart knowledge but also shape students' values and attitudes. When teachers are fair and treat students equally, it helps students learn better and feel more respected [2]. Ethics in teaching isn't just about following rules; it also helps students grow into better people. Students see teachers as role models. If teachers behave ethically, students will try to copy those behaviors, like being honest and respectful [3]. Even though ethics are important, it's not always easy for teachers to follow them. For example, in some schools, teachers might have too much work, and this makes it harder for them to act ethically all the time [4]. Studies by [5] have shown that ethical dilemmas often arise in educational settings, such as issues related to grading fairness, favoritism, student privacy, and professional boundaries. The way teachers handle these dilemmas reflects their understanding and application of ethical principles.

Students have shared their experiences of ethical and unethical behavior in schools. For example, one study showed that many students have faced discrimination or harsh treatment from teachers, which makes learning harder ([6]) On the positive side, students also said that teachers who help them morally or financially create a much better learning experience [7].

Institutional ethics is another major focus in the literature. According to [8], the ethical culture of an educational institution reflects the collective values of its staff. Institutions that prioritize ethical behavior tend to achieve higher academic credibility and public trust. In Sri Lanka, several studies have indicated that maintaining ethical standards among academic staff contributes significantly to educational quality and institutional reputation. These studies highlight the need for regular ethical training and clear codes of conduct for academic professionals.

Overall, existing research demonstrates that professional ethics among educators play a vital role in maintaining educational quality, ensuring fairness, and fostering positive learning environments. However, there remains a need for context-specific studies—such as those focusing on Sri Lankan higher education institutions—to understand how teachers interpret and practice ethical principles in their local contexts. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the professional ethics of academic staff at the Advanced Technological Institute (ATI), Gampaha.

METHODOLOGY

This study a quantitative research approach based on primary data. Data was collected using a **structured questionnaire** distributed in hard copy format to all lecturers. The questionnaire was specifically designed to address the key areas of professional ethics, including familiarity with ethical practices, challenges faced, and institutional support mechanisms. **Closed-ended questions** were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages.

ANALYSIS

Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents, including designation and years of teaching experience, were analyzed to contextualize their insights. According to figure 1 Senior Lecturers formed the majority of respondents, reflecting perspectives from more experienced educators.

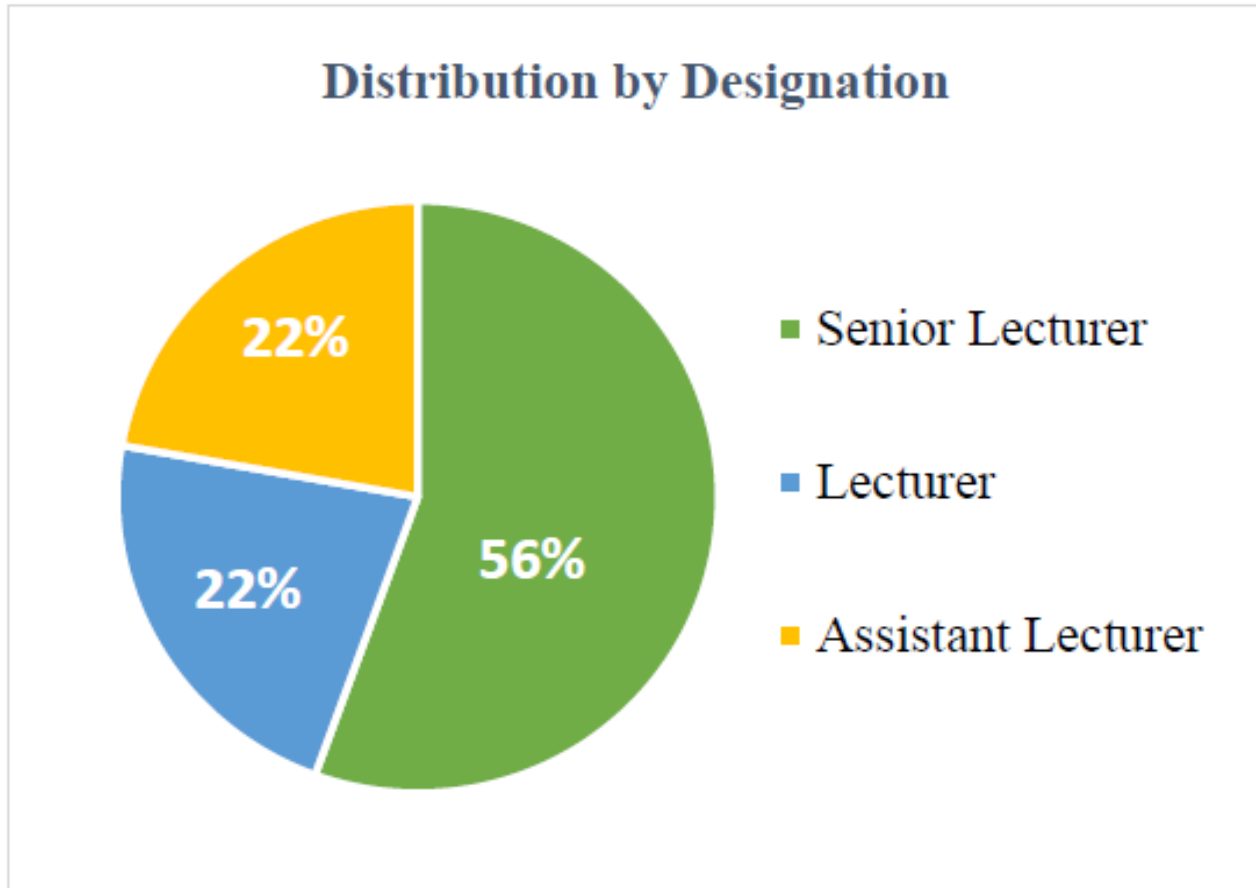


Figure 1: Designation of Respondents

According to table 1 most respondents (88.88%) had over 11 years of teaching experience, providing insights based on extensive academic exposure

Table 1: Experience of Respondents

Years of Experience	Percentage
More than 15 years	44.44%
11- 15 years	44.44%
6-10 years	11.11%

Familiarity with and Confidence in Ethics

While all respondents are familiar with professional ethics, only 44.44% feel "Very Confident," indicating a potential gap between awareness and application. More than half of "Somewhat Confident" responses (55.56%) highlight the need for training to boost confidence levels. The spearman's rank correlation factor between familiarity and confidence is 0.35 which indicates there is a medium positive correlation between the values. According to table 2, component matrix the factor perception is best described by the variables attitude towards importance of professional ethics and confidence regarding professional ethics.

Table 2: Factor Analysis

Component Matrix^a

	Component
	1
importance	.866
confidence	.903
considerethics	.446

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

Ethical Challenges

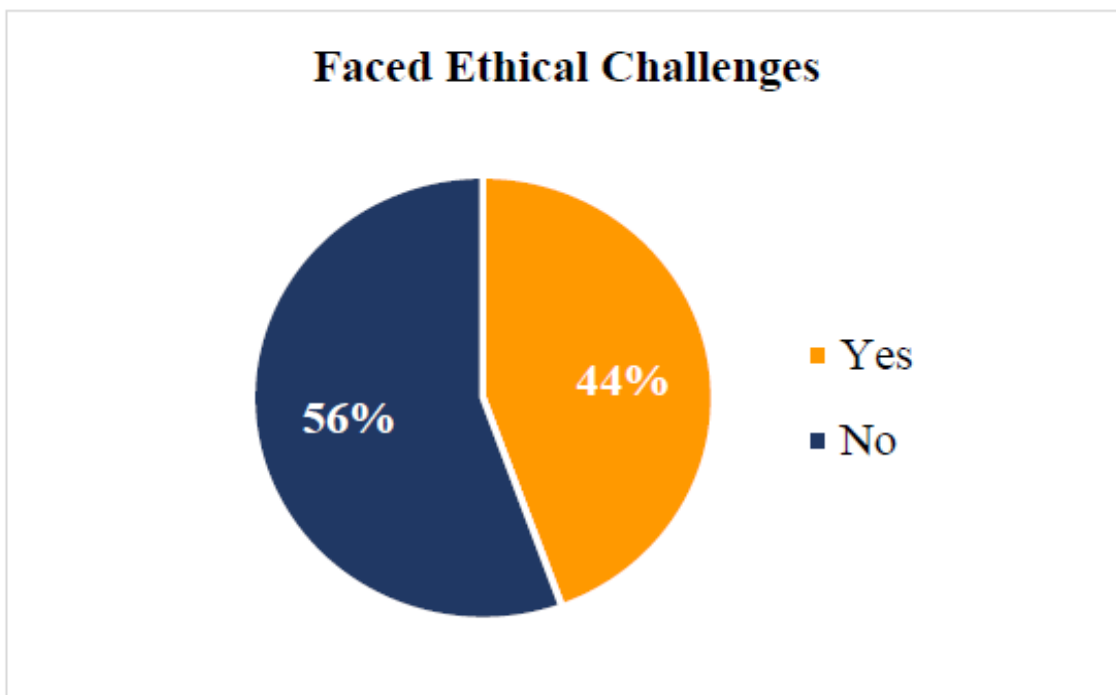


Figure 2: Ethical Challenges

As per figure 2 nearly half of the respondents reported encountering ethical challenges, signaling the need for institutional support to address these issues. Senior Lecturers with more than 15 years of experience reported the most challenges. This may reflect their longer exposure to ethical dilemmas in academia.

Institutional Support

Table 3: Training Provided for Ethical Practices

Training Status	Percentage
Yes	33.33%
No	66.67%

Table 2 depicts that the majority (66.67%) reported not receiving any ethics training, highlighting a critical gap in professional development

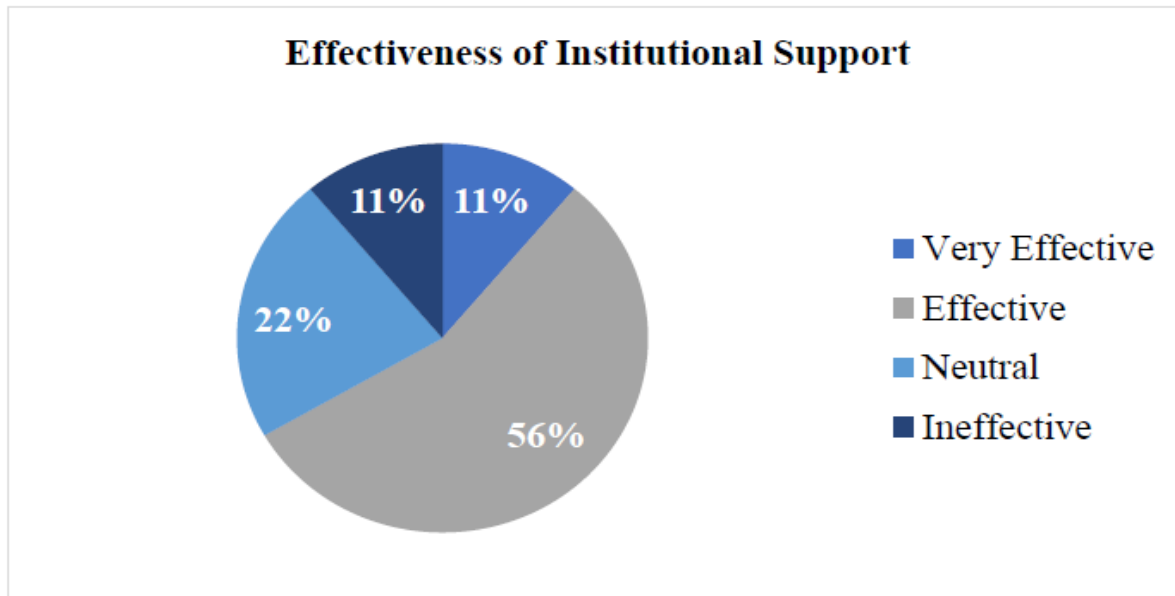


Figure 3: Effectiveness of Institutional Support

According to figure 3 most respondents found institutional support effective, but 33.33% rated it as neutral or ineffective, indicating room for improvement in promoting and enforcing ethical practices.

Interest in Ethics Training

Table 4: Interest in ethical training

Response	Percentage
Yes	77.78%
Maybe	11.11%
No	11.11%

According to table 3 the high interest in ethics training reflects lecturers' recognition of its importance. This demonstrates a need for structured workshops or programs.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the professional ethics of lecturers at ATI Gampaha. A majority of respondents are familiar with professional ethics, with 44.44% expressing high confidence in their ability to apply ethical standards. While lecturers are familiar with ethics, their confidence in applying ethical standards varies. This aligns with existing literature that highlights the importance of ongoing ethics training to strengthen educators' ability to handle ethical dilemmas in practice

44.44% of lecturers reported facing ethical challenges, with common issues including student dishonesty, favoritism in academic evaluations, and conflicts of interest. These challenges highlight the ongoing ethical dilemmas in academic settings, which can negatively affect both students and staff if not properly addressed. Further this finding confirms what other studies have observed globally, where similar ethical concerns affect the credibility of educational systems.

A substantial portion of respondents (77.78%) expressed interest in further ethics training. This reflects a proactive attitude toward improving their understanding of ethical practices, indicating that there is demand for structured professional development opportunities in this area.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the current state of professional ethics among lecturers at ATI Gampaha and highlights the challenges they face. The findings suggest that while familiarity with ethics is high, there is a significant need for training and institutional support. By addressing these needs through structured training programs, clearer policies, and more accessible reporting mechanisms, ATI Gampaha can strengthen its ethical practices and ensure a fair, transparent, and respectful academic environment.

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